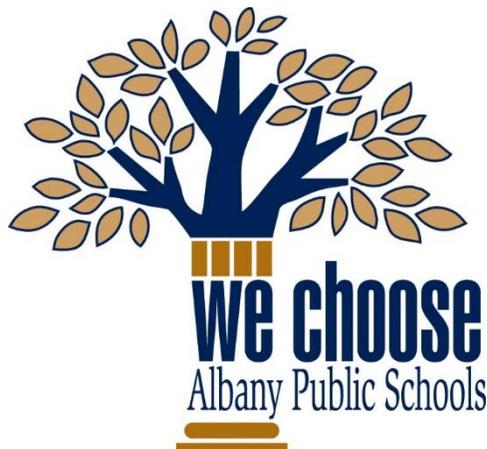


City School District of Albany

Communications Plan

2018-19



Updated April 2019

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Introduction

Effective two-way communication – listening as well as providing timely information and answers – is a foundational element of strong relationships that help all students succeed. The City School District of Albany believes that clear, consistent and honest two-way communication with all stakeholders in our diverse community is a critical component in supporting our vision, mission and goals, as well as a cycle of continuous improvement.

The primary objective of our 2018-19 Communications Plan is to establish a framework to achieve this with all internal and external audiences – Board of Education members, employees, families, students, community members, and business, civic and educational leaders.

Communication done well across an organization supports a vibrant, safe and collaborative school community. It underpins successful outcomes for all students.

Inconsistent communication creates opportunities for inaccurate information, misperceptions and distrust. In the end, inconsistent communication limits our students' opportunities to learn and grow.

The responsibility to build a communication infrastructure that supports trust and transparency begins with our board, superintendent and Communications and Operations Division. However, we believe that all district employees are integral to that success. The 2018-19 Communications Plan has been developed to guide that work throughout the organization.

District Vision, Mission, Goals and 2018-19 Priorities

Our vision

The City School District of Albany will be a district of excellence with caring relationships and engaging learning experiences that provide equitable opportunities for all students to reach their potential.

Our mission

The mission of the City School District of Albany is to work in partnership with our diverse community to engage every learner in a robust educational program designed to provide the knowledge and skills necessary for success.

Our goals and 2018-19 priorities

- Increase **student achievement** in early literacy, close the achievement gaps and increase graduation rate by focusing on the unique factors that impact student success.

- Continue to develop, implement, enhance and monitor social-emotional supports
 - Continue to enhance and monitor instructional systems for student success including AVID, IB, K-2 literacy, STEM, STEAM, and RTI
 - Address high school and middle school facility needs through Albany High rebuild and middle school configuration
- Enhance the delivery of **quality instruction** by providing our teachers and staff with high-level, meaningful professional development to promote student growth and proficiency.
 - Enhance and implement culturally responsive education best practices
 - Continue to develop, implement, enhance, and monitor how we use data to enhance instructional practices
 - Increase workforce diversity through creative recruiting and by planning for a strong “grow our own” strategy
- Build our **leadership capacity and increase accountability** through ongoing professional growth opportunities designed to improve effective leadership in our organization.
 - Continue to work with building leaders to provide high quality instructional walkthroughs with actionable feedback
 - Increase workforce diversity
 - Implement distributive leadership models in order to build leadership capacity
 - Provide leadership professional development opportunities
- **Empower families** to support the success of their children through relationships of mutual respect and clear and effective communication.
 - Develop and monitor a written district-wide Communication Plan with an emphasis on building level communication and family engagement
 - Implement **schooltool**, our new student information management system
 - Launch the new albanyschools.org
 - Provide customer-service training for faculty and staff to improve school climate and family engagement
- Partner with our **diverse community**, including local businesses and community leaders, to engage and empower stakeholders in the wrap-around services needed to support our students
 - Continue to develop and monitor the Community Schools model
 - Continue to develop and monitor reciprocal community-engagement strategies
 - Welcome community partners in schools

2018-19 Communications Goals

The City School District of Albany Communications and Operations Division has established the following Communications Goals for the 2018-19 school year:

- Successfully realign the Communications structure to provide enhanced support for schools and departments, and increase opportunities to engage families and community members in settings outside of school
- Develop and implement the 2018-19 Communication Plan
- Partner with the Assessment, Accountability and Technology Innovation Division to successfully develop and launch the first phase of the new district website – albanyschools.org
- Establish a monthly district TV program accessible to all community members via Channel Albany (public-access TV) and albanyschools.org
- Work with school and district leaders to develop clear, effective, culturally responsive communications across all channels
- Continue to seek out and develop increased opportunities for family and community feedback (two-way communication opportunities)
- Continue to seek out and develop increased opportunities to engage with our community to provide timely, transparent information about key district initiatives, with a particular focus on more effectively reaching stakeholders who lack access to many traditional communication channels
- Increase professional-development opportunities for Communications and Community Engagement staff:
 - 2018 National Family and Community Engagement Conference, Cleveland
 - 2018 New York State School Boards Association Annual Convention, New York City

Target Audiences and Primary Communication Channels

The City School District of Albany strives to foster open two-way communication pathways with all stakeholders who have a role in supporting the success of our students. These target audiences include both internal and external stakeholders.

Internal audiences

- Board of Education
- Administrators (building and district levels)
- Faculty
- Support Staff

External audiences

- Students
- Parents and guardians
- Parent-teacher organizations
- Neighborhood associations
- Elected leaders
- Law-enforcement agencies
- Business partners
- Community partners
- Local colleges and universities
- City of Albany residents
- Faith-based organizations
- Local media

Primary communication channels

- District website (albanyschools.org, including an online Feedback form)
- Individual school websites
- School News Notifier (SNN)
- Facebook
- Twitter
- “Capital Education” (quarterly city-wide newsletter)
- Annual district calendar
- Other district-wide and school-based publications
- Local media
- Staff presentations at schools and community organizations
- Staff email

Communications, Creative and Community Engagement Departments

The district realigned the Communications and Community Engagement offices in 2018 to better meet our growing needs for clear, consistent and timely two-way communications at both the district and school levels. Fundamental objectives of this realignment were to provide enhanced support for schools and departments, and to increase opportunities to engage families and community members in settings outside of school.

Departmental structure

Director of Communications and Operations Ron Lesko

The director of communications and operations is responsible for long-range planning, and short- and mid-range execution, in the areas of communications, creative development, crisis communications, community engagement, community partnerships, advertising, marketing, photography, social media, video development, website design and content management, charter schools, government relations and transportation.

- **Contact Ron:**
 - o – (518) 475-6065
 - cell – (518) 376-0013
 - rlesko@albany.k12.ny.us

Communications Department

The Communications Department is responsible for content development for all district-level publications and collateral material, media relations, photography and social media, and with providing direct communications support to all schools and departments across the organization.

Each member of the Communications staff is designated as a liaison for specific schools and departments as follows:

Assistant Director of Communications Lisa Angerame

- Albany High School/Abrookin Career and Technical Center
- Albany International Center
- Delaware Community School
- Edmund J. O’Neal Middle School of Excellence
- Giffen Memorial Elementary School
- New Scotland Elementary School
- Philip J. Schuyler Achievement Academy
- Thomas O’Brien Academy of Science and Technology (TOAST)
- William S. Hackett Middle School
- Departments:
 - Early Childhood
 - STEM
 - Music
 - Pupil Personnel Services
 - Special Education
 - Volunteers
- **Contact Lisa:**
 - (518) 475-6066
 - langerame@albany.k12.ny.us

Communications Specialist Abigail Bleck

- Albany School of Humanities (ASH)
- Arbor Hill Elementary School
- Eagle Point Elementary School
- Montessori Magnet School
- North Albany Academy
- Pine Hills Elementary School
- Sheridan Preparatory Academy
- Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School
- Tony Clement Center for Education
- Departments:
 - Athletics
 - Buildings and Grounds
 - Central Registration
 - Humanities (including Foreign Language)
 - Technology
 - Visual and Performing Arts
- **Contact Abby:**
 - (518) 475-6079
 - ableck@albany.k12.ny.us

Creative Department

The Creative Department is responsible graphic design, photography, video development, and website design and content management.

Creative Content Coordinator Jake Planck

- **Contact Jake:**
 - (518) 475-6068
 - jplanck@albany.k12.ny.us

Community Engagement Department

The Community Engagement Department is responsible for outreach, engagement and Parent University programming to provide information and support to families and community members, and to solicit feedback about district initiatives and operations.

The department also is responsible for managing the district's community-outreach liaisons, and for the coordination of community partnerships.

Community Engagement Coordinator Cathy Edmondson

- **Contact Cathy:**
 - (518) 475-6067
 - cedmondson@albany.k12.ny.us

2018-19 District Publication Schedule

The Communications and Creative departments take a leadership role in a busy schedule of publications annually, in partnership with divisions, departments and schools throughout the organization, to support important district-wide communications objectives.

2018-19 Student Code of Conduct

(in partnership with Pupil Personnel Services)

Delivery date to printer: Aug. 3, 2018

2018-19 District calendar

Delivery date to printer: Aug. 10, 2018

2019-20 Albany High lottery application

(in partnership with Albany High School)

Delivery date to printer: Sept. 28, 2018

Fall 2018 newsletter

Delivery date to printer: Nov. 2, 2018

2019-20 Albany High course book

(in partnership with Albany High School)

Delivery date to printer: Nov. 30, 2018

2019-20 Magnet lottery application

(in partnership with Elementary Instruction Division, magnet elementary schools)

Delivery date to printer: Dec. 14, 2018

2019-20 Magnet lottery postcard

(in partnership with Elementary Instruction Division, magnet elementary schools)

Delivery date to printer: Dec. 14

2019-20 Albany High School unique pathways booklet

(in partnership with Secondary Instruction Division, Albany High School)

Delivery date to printer: TBD

2019-20 Middle School Curriculum Guide

(in partnership with Secondary Instruction, Curriculum and Instruction divisions)

Delivery date to printer: TBD

2019-20 Pre-K lottery application

(in partnership with Elementary Instruction Division, Early Childhood Department)

Delivery date to printer: Jan. 14, 2019

2019-20 Pre-K lottery postcard

(in partnership with Elementary Instruction Division, Early Childhood Department)

Delivery date to printer: Jan. 14, 2019

Winter 2019 newsletter

Delivery date to printer: Feb. 7, 2019

2019-20 budget newsletter

(in partnership with Business and Finance Division)

Delivery date to printer: April 18, 2019

2019-20 budget postcard

(in partnership with Business and Finance Division)

Delivery date to printer: April 24, 2019

Spring 2019 newsletter

Delivery date to printer: June 10, 2019

Digital Communications and Social Media

The City School District of Albany uses Facebook, Twitter and School News Notifier (SNN) as its primary digital communications tools.

School News Notifier (SNN)

SNN is an email information system that includes a text-messaging option for emergency news such as weather-related closings. There are 29 categories and more than 6,000 registered users (April 2019). All family members and community members are encouraged to sign up in multiple categories to stay in touch with what's happening at your school and district-wide. All schools are required to use SNN at least weekly and are encouraged to use it even more frequently as an important communication tool.

The district sent 1,813 SNN messages during the 2017-18 school year, an 11.2 percent increase over 2016-17. That included 844 messages from the schools in 2017-18, a 12.4 percent increase over the previous school year. You can sign up for SNN at albanyschools.org/snn.

Facebook – @albanyschools

Facebook is the district's most popular social-media tool with nearly 6,700 followers (April

2019). The district makes active use of its Facebook page to share photos, videos and information from throughout the district.

Twitter -- @albanyschools

The district also uses Twitter as an additional digital communication channel for photos, videos and information. The district's Twitter page has nearly 1,600 followers (April 2019).

Media Relations

Working with the print and digital media organizations in the Capital Region is an important element of the City School District of Albany's overall Communication Plan. The media provide important pathways for sharing information with all of our stakeholder groups. Positive relationships with all members of the media are critical to our overall communications objectives.

The Communications and Operations Division provides the following guidelines to all administrators on an annual basis to assist in maintaining positive relationships with all media organizations.

All news stories provide us an opportunity to shine.

- Stories about our great people and programs speak for themselves.
- Stories about our challenges provide opportunities to assure our community that we are working together, both as district staff and in partnership with our community, to ensure an environment of high expectations, high performance and continuous improvement for all of our students and all of our staff.

All staff members can help build and maintain positive relationships with the media.

- Trust all members of the media to do their jobs responsibly.
- Keep the good news coming! If you see good news happening in a classroom near you, please share that information with the Communications Department. Remember these essentials:
 - If it is an upcoming event, please provide Communications with as much time as possible to plan so that we can maximize the coverage and reach.
 - Who (is involved in the event or activity)?
 - What (is the news – an event, an award, etc.)?
 - When and where (is it happening, or when did it happen)?
 - Why (is it important for the community to know about it)?
- Let the Communications team know ASAP about bad news as well – 24/7/365.
- Be accessible – and know that we're here to help. Telling people about our good news isn't enough, we need to show them.
- Personalizing stories – putting a face or faces on key strategic initiatives or important data points – is critical for the media.

- The media love to tell our stories through our students, so please remember those signed Photo/Media Release Forms!
- **Never** feel obligated or pressured to talk to the media if they contact you directly. **Always** redirect them to a member of the Communications team and we will work with them to make all necessary arrangements to tell your story.
- If you or a member of your staff are contacted directly by a member of the media and conduct an interview or allow access to your building or program, please contact Ron Lesko or Lisa Angerame *immediately* to let us know.
 - **Advance notice is greatly appreciated and highly preferred – and as much as possible.**

When you are interviewed.

- **Nothing** is “off the record.”
 - Assume **everything** you say will be published, broadcast, tweeted, shared, etc.
- You are the expert.
 - Remember that the media is coming to you for help to find out about something they don’t know about, and to let the community know about something that they believe is important.
 - The Communications team is here to help you sort through all of the things you know about a topic, and to discern what is important and what is not in telling your story to the public.
- Always prepare in advance.
 - Contact the Communications Department to discuss opportunities and potential “hot spots.”
 - Your Communications liaison will work with you to script 3-5 key messages on the topic to be addressed. These are the most important things you want the public to know about the story.
 - Decide what you won’t say, but avoid “no comment” in response to any question. Reporters have the right to ask you any question they want, and you have the right to answer in any way that makes the most sense for you and the organization based on your knowledge and expertise in the area in which you are conducting the interview.
 - Know your vital statistics.
 - Keep answers simple and avoid jargon.
 - If you don’t know the answer, say so and offer to get the answer.
 - Do not guess at an answer or make an assumption.
 - Accent the positive; do not repeat negative phrasing.

Be sure every student in your building or classroom has a signed Photo/Media Release Form.

- No approval from home means “no” to photos and interviews.
- The form is included in this Communications Plan as **Appendix A** and also available in the Online News Center at albanyschools.org.

- Having an updated form for each student will make things much easier and efficient when working with the media and in using school photos for district materials. It will help make it easier for us to share with the world all of the great things that are happening in Albany’s public school!
- **Please note** that the City School District of Albany Photo/Media Release Form applies only to the use of student images or interviews by the district. It does not allow use of student images or interviews by any external organizations. Each external organization needs to have its own Photo/Media Release Form signed by a student’s parent or guardian before being allowed to use student images or interviews.

Emergency Communications Protocol

Clear, accurate, timely communication during an emergency is a critical part of a crisis-response plan and an integral component of the City School District of Albany’s school security protocol.

In the event of an emergency that involves the implementation of security measures such as lockdown, lockout or shelter-in-place procedures or precautions, the district Communications Department is responsible for all communications. This includes all internal and external communications, including social media, websites, staff email, and individual and group phone calls or text messages.

Schools should send no communications in any format while the emergency procedures are in place.

Here is the communication procedure that building and district leaders should follow **urgently** whenever emergency security measures are put in place:

1. The building principal immediately contacts the district security director and appropriate assistant superintendent for instruction.
 - i. ***Building leaders should note that if, in their assessment of the security risk, it is necessary to activate the immediate emergency notification system to the police, they should activate this response as soon as possible in addition to engaging the security director and assistant superintendent.***
2. The assistant superintendent contacts the superintendent.
3. The assistant superintendent contacts the director of communications and operations to begin drafting an initial communication.
 - i. Office – (518) 475-6065
 - ii. Cell – (518) 376-0013

4. The director of communications and operations shares a draft of the initial communication with the following individuals for review and approval:
 - i. Superintendent
 - ii. Assistant superintendent
 - iii. Security director
5. The superintendent must approve all communications before they are sent. Once that approval has been given, the director of communications and operations sends the message using all appropriate communication tools. Messages are sent in the following order:
 - i. Board of Education members (email)
 - ii. External stakeholders (using all appropriate communication tools)
 - iii. Internal stakeholders (building or district-wide email, if applicable)
6. At Academy Park, the secretary to the superintendent distributes all official district communications sent via School News Notifier to all support staff in the Superintendent's Office to use as a script for answering phone calls related to the matter.
7. In the main office of the impacted school, the secretary to the principal distributes all official district communications sent via School News Notifier to all staff supporting the main office to use as a script for answering phone calls related to the matter.
8. The building principal remains in direct contact with the assistant superintendent and district security director at all times while emergency measures are in place.
9. The assistant superintendent remains in direct contact with the director of communications and operations to provide updates. All subsequent communications follow the same review, approval and distribution process outlined in steps 4-5.
10. In the event that the director of communications and operations is not immediately available, the assistant superintendent should contact members of the Communications Department in the following order:
 - i. Assistant director of communications – (518) 475-6066
 - ii. Communications specialist – (518) 475-6079
 - iii. Creative content coordinator -- (518) 475-6068

Advertising

The City School District of Albany engages in strategic advertising as a part of its overall Communications Plan. The district's advertising goals are narrowly focused and value-driven to maximize the impact of key messages with primary stakeholder groups. The Communications and Operations Division plans annual advertising campaigns using the following platforms:

- Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) buses and bus shelters
- JAMZ/96.3 FM
- KISS/102.3 FM
- Landmark Spectrum 8 Movie Theatres

Official Logos

City School District of Albany

The “We Choose” logo is the official logo of the City School District of Albany. The district prohibits the use of any other logo to represent the district. Please contact the Creative Department if you would like to use the “We Choose” logo in any file format.



Albany High School

The Falcon and script capital “A” are the official logos of Albany High School. The district prohibits the use of any other logo to represent Albany High School. Use of the script capital “A” logo is acceptable on a white or black background. Please contact the Creative Department if you would like to use the Falcon or script capital “A” logos in any file format.



All other district schools

Please contact the Creative Department if you would like to use the official logo for City School District of Albany middle and elementary schools.

School-based Communications

Supporting clear, consistent and timely communications at the school level in addition to the district level is a critical element of the 2018-19 Communication Plan. Through a cycle of continuous improvement, district and school leaders have identified a gap between what staff believe families and community members know, and what families and community members say they need.

To support school leaders in closing this information gap, the Communications and Operations Division is aligned to assist with school-level communications. This includes assisting school leaders or their designees with the development and distribution of school newsletters, flyers, letters to families and content review for digital communications via School News Notifier (SNN).

District leadership also has assigned school leaders with minimum communication requirements. The district also encourages school leaders, in partnership with their respective liaisons from the district's Communications Department, to research and implement new communication tools that will provide additional pathways to share information and encourage parents and guardians to engage more actively in their children's overall school experience.

School News Notifier (SNN)

The district requires each school to use SNN **a minimum of once a week** to share information with families and to encourage their participation in school activities and events. The Communications Department provides a step-by-step list of guidelines to assist staff members in sending SNN messages (see **Appendix B**).

School newsletters

Each school is required to send home a newsletter updating families about important information, noteworthy achievements and upcoming events **at least quarterly** during the school year. The district also encourages more frequent school newsletters (monthly, bimonthly, etc.).

To assist school leaders in achieving these goals, the district's Communications Department has assigned a liaison to each school (see pgs. 7-8). School leaders and their designees can provide information to their respective liaison by a previously agreed-upon date. The Communications liaison will proof all material and contact the school leader or designee for any questions before laying out the material in each school's approved newsletter template.

Once the school has approved the final content, the Communications Department will print copies of the newsletter in color and deliver the copies to the school to be sent home with each student. The Communications Department also will share each edition of the schools' newsletters via that school's individual SNN category.

Please see **Appendix C** for a schedule and frequency of school newsletters during the 2018-19 school year.

School flyers

To assist school leaders in providing more consistent, easy-to-use information for families, the Creative Department developed fillable flyer templates for the 2018-19 school year. The intent of these templates is to make it easier and faster for school staff to create flyers that also are branded with each school's consistent "look and feel."

School social media

The City School District of Albany encourages the responsible use of social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter as an important tool in an overall school-level communications program. Schools throughout the district of Albany are becoming more proficient in using Facebook and Twitter to engage families and community members in support of student achievement.

Guidelines for social media use:

- School leaders or their designees are responsible for monitoring the content closely to be sure that anything inappropriate is deleted ASAP and that responsible parties are dealt with accordingly (blocked and reported to the appropriate administrator and Communications Department liaison immediately).
- If you or another staff person cannot commit to monitoring the content regularly, schools should not commit to the use of social media tools.
- School leaders should limit the number of people with access to post on the school's page(s). It would be preferable if one person is solely responsible. The principal and the appropriate Communications Department liaison must have all login information for all social media pages.
- Use the official district log as your profile picture.
- Please like/follow the district's Facebook and Twitter pages and share/retweet district-wide info that would be relevant to all families (board meetings, budget votes, Albany High news, etc.). We also encourage schools to share/retweet any information related to schools that feed into your school, or schools to which your students will move on as they progress toward high school graduation. This will help students and families begin to develop positive impressions of the next schools they will be part of along their educational journey.

Information for Families and Community Members

The City School District of Albany employs a variety of communications tools and mediums to share information with families and community members, to allow families and community members to provide input and feedback on important district and school developments, and to provide clear lines of communication that families and community members can use to get timely answers to their questions.

Give us a call!

The quickest way to get the information you need is to call our district headquarters at Academy Park – **(518) 475-6000**. Staff there can direct your call to the appropriate office at Academy Park, or at any school or building throughout the district.

Find us online

Our website – **albanyschools.org** – provides a wide range of information about all aspects of district and school operations. We're in the process of a full design of **albanyschools.org** during the 2018-19 school year, so look for a brand new site with improved functionality and organization – not to mention a fresh new look! – in 2019.

Our site includes a **Feedback form** to allow you to direct specific questions to us via email. Questions sent to us via the Feedback form go to the Communications Department and are distributed to the correct person in the district for a timely response.

Family and Community Communication Guide

New for the 2018-19 school year, we have developed a communication flow chart to help families and community members understand the best places to begin to get answers to specific questions, and the next steps up the organizational ladder if you have additional questions (see **Appendix D**).

Follow us on social media

We use several digital communication and social media tools to help share information and updates. You can follow us on Facebook and Twitter, and also sign up for email communications via School News Notifier (SNN). Please refer to pgs. 10-11 for more information.

When bad weather hits

When wintry weather heads our way, the City School District of Albany has a plan in place to monitor developments and make timely decisions about possible school closures or delays. We encourage all staff, families and community members to rely on multiple sources of information in these circumstances (see Appendix E for the district's full Weather Emergency Procedures document). Please sign up for, follow or tune in to these channels to stay up-to-date:

- Sign up for School News Notifier (SNN) to receive text and email messages about school closings and delay announcements. You can visit **albanyschools.org/snn** to register.
- Follow us on Facebook and Twitter -- @albanyschools
- We'll update our website with information and updates – **albanyschools.org**
- Check out any of the following media outlets:
 - CBS6 Albany (Ch. 6)
 - Spectrum News (Ch. 9)
 - WTEN (Ch. 10)
 - WNYT (Ch. 13)
 - WROW-AM 590
 - WGY-AM 810
 - WTRY AM 890
 - WFLY-FM 92.3
 - WYJB-FM 95.5
 - WAJZ-FM 96.3
 - WTRY-FM 98.3
 - WRVE-FM 99.5
 - WZMR-FM 100.9
 - WKKF-FM 102.3
 - WPYX-FM 106.5
 - **timesunion.com**